DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 140 271 CS 003 510

AUTHOR Wenzel, Evelyn
TITLE RESEARCH SUMMARY: Basic Skills in Handwriting and Spelling.
PUB DATE May 77
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association (22nd, Miami Beach, Florida, May 2-6, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Bibliographies; Cursive Writing; *Educational Research; Elementary Education; Handwriting; *Handwriting Instruction; *Literature Reviews; Manuscript Writing (Handlettering); Spelling; *Spelling Instruction

ABSTRACT

Research related to methods for building competency in spelling has yielded information about three areas of teaching: word selection, generalizations to be taught, and application of spelling skills to writing. Research on word selection indicates that teachers should choose basic, high-frequency words for children to learn to spell, giving special attention to words which are persistently misspelled. The teaching of generalizations should be taught in conjunction with the use of whole-word techniques. Finally, research indicates that it is essential to teach spelling in conjunction with functional writing. Research related to methods for building handwriting skills deals with two major controversial areas: manuscript and cursive writing and the achievement of legibility. Research indicates that, for some students, a shift from cursive writing back to manuscript writing should be encouraged beyond grade six. Although considerable research has been directed toward identifying factors affecting legibility of handwriting, researchers have failed to find agreement on such factors. The paper includes bibliographies of references on spelling and handwriting. (GW)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED140271

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
GAINESVILLE

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

RESEARCH SUMMARY: Basic Skills in Handwriting and Spelling

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Evelyn Wenzel

TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

by

Evelyn Wenzel

Professor, Department of Instructional
Leadership and Support Services

Universtiy of Florida
Gainesville, Florida

CS003510

RESEARCH SUMMARY: Basic Skills in Handwriting and Spelling

Spelling

Research to support decisions about building competency in spelling was gathered in three areas about which issues have rather persistently revolved: word selection, generalizations to be taught, and application of spelling skills to writing.

The year of 1950 roughly divides two somewhat distinctive periods of research in spelling. Before 1950, the research of Horn, Hildreth and Fitzgerald had significant impact on spelling programs generally in use from the 1920's through the 1950's.

Beginning in the 1950's research in spelling took on a "new look", primarily due to influences--linguistics and computers. Gradually, recommendations about spelling programs began to reflect the findings of the Stanford group (the Hannas, Hodges, and Rudorf) published in the USOE report of 1966, but publicized rather widely in journals during the years preceding this final report. Research stimulated by the Stanford study--that of Personke, Yee, Venezky, Brengelman, Carol Chomsky, Graham and Rudorf, Kligman, Petty, Read, Simon, and others--permits some tentative conclusions that give direction for planning programs to build competency in spelling.

Word Selection. The most important words for children to learn to spell are the basic, high frequency words, with special attention given to demons or most persistently misspelled of these basic words. (This, in spite of recommendations that followed the Stanford study that words be selected and taught by spelling patterns.) Beyond the basic core of words should be added words of local interest and need, and for older children, a judicious inclusion of words needed in various curriculum areas.

Generalizations: The usefulness of teaching generalizations has gained sufficient support to discourage teaching each word as a separate learning act, i.e. primarily by rote memorization. Important evidence exists, however, to suggest that too exclusive reliance on generalizations--particularly on patterns of sound-to-symbol regularities--cannot be justified for several reasons: because encoding is different from decoding; because pronunciations vary with dialects and contexts of words within sentences, and because results of teaching some of them to students do not support their value for spelling words new to students.

Regularities beyond phonological ones must be taught, particularly to older students who should begin to recognize variant forms of the same word. The recognition of such regularities helps to discourage the over-use of pronunciation, and to alleviate spelling problems attributed to dialect differences.

If generalizations are to be of maximum usefulness, students should be tested, not just on word lists studied, but on their ability to apply generalizations to words whose spelling is unknown.

The use of generalizations should be supplemented by whole word techniques. These techniques must work together rather than compete. The question is how rather than whether to use each.

Recent research contains rather convincing evidence that children learn how to spell as well as being taught how to do it. Young children invent their own spellings and older ones learn some words as a by-product of reading and writing. These findings suggest that teachers recognize and reward increasingly more accurate approximations of correct spellings, rather than expect full conformity by students whose writing skills are as

yet immature. A teacher might well commend a child, then, for a good misspelling of a word.

Application to Writing. Finally, the research strongly indicates that, while direct instruction in spelling is necessary and should continue beyond the elementary grades, teaching it in functional writing is essential. Such teaching provides motivation for proofreading and encourages incidental learning of many words. Proofreading makes imperative, also, the need to teach older students the specific skills needed to use the dictionary to spell words.

Research both generates and thrives upon controversy. Researchers, likewise, are stimulated by it. Controversy is more likely, however, to frustrate and confuse classroom teachers, particularly when researchers rush too hastily into prescriptions and production of materials. A good part of the value of the Stanford research lay in the stimulation it is providing for further research, and in the thoughtful interpretation it is generating--rather than in the programs and materials it spawned. At the present time there is available information culled from the best of past and recent research in spelling that may be usefully applied in classroom practice, provided it is put in a form to make sense to non-researchers. A few researchers are themselves suggesting that teachers, given the information, make decisions about application to classroom practice. One of them says, ". . . he who has never taught even one child to read and write should certainly be reticent in offering advice to those who have made it their career."

Handwriting

Research in handwriting pertinent to building skills for achieving competency deals with two major areas of controversy: manuscript and cursive

writing and legibility as a standard to be achieved. The research conducted and surveyed by Anderson, Freeman, and Herrick provide the basis for most of the issues and generalizations regarding handwriting instruction generally practiced today.

Manuscript and Cursive Handwriting. The teaching of manuscript as the initial handwriting form, followed by changeover to cursive in the second or third grade, is standard practice in most schools today. Time honored reasons exist for observing this sequence.

Beyond grade six, if, as the research shows, standard forms give way to personal styles, and if such styles are in the direction of simplifying letter forms for the sake of legibility, then manuscript writing, well established as the simpler form, has advantages to recommend its use. The shift from cursive back to manuscript might well be encouraged, particularly for students planning to enter certain kinds of job training. Such a practice suggests raising, in a new context, a question long asked by those who have struggled to change children over from manuscript to cursive, "Why teach cursive handwriting at all?" Getting the public to consider such a revolutionary possibility is probably comparable to getting enthusiastic support to raise taxes.

Legibility. Legibility has been extensively cited as the principal objective in handwriting programs today. Considerable research has been directed toward identifying factors affecting legibility of handwriting. Those most commonly named are letter formation, slant, and spacing. Simplicity of letter formation is advocated. Personal variations of standard forms appear in the upper elementary grades and such individuality is generally encouraged, provided the writing is legible.

Illegibility increases in the handwriging of older children. Reduction in such illegibilities comes about as the writer is helped to identify specific malformations. Such knowledge is essential if older students are to independently proofread and correct illegibilities.

According to Groff, who reviewed current recommendations for teaching handwriting, the future of legibility as a standard appears to be toppling from its place at che head of the list of objectives. He points to the failure to find agreement on factors significant for determining legibility to the declining value of using writing scales, to the leveling off of improvement in writing in grades 4-6, and to the decline in quality beyond grade six when direct instruction disappears from school programs. He suggests abandoning efforts to improve legibility and looking toward technology for communication with others, and for new forms of shorthand for personal needs.

The lull in research effort in handwriting in recent years may be a prelude to research that takes new directions described in Groff's futuristic speculations. In the meantime, teachers should not be surprised to hear a discernible ground swell of demand that teaching handwriting be emphasized through the eighth grade.

REFERENCES ON HANDWRITING

1. Ahrens, Maurice R. "Handwriting," in Maurice R. Ahrens, (ed.), Communication Skills, Part III. Gainesville, Florida: Florida Educational Research and Development Council, 1971, pp. 5-41

2. Anderson, Dan W. "Correlates of Handwriting Legibility: What Makes Writing Readable?" in Martha L. King, Robert Emans, and Patricia J. Cianciolo, The Language Arts in the Elementary School: A Forum for Focus, Urbana: NCTE, 1973, 137-143.

3. Anderson, Dan and Wayne Otto. "Handwriting," in Robert Ebel, (ed.) Encyclopedia of Educational Research, 4th ed. New York: Macmillan, 1969, 572.

4. Anderson, Dan W. "Handwriting Research: Movement and Quality." Elementary English. 42 (January, 1965), 45-53.

5. Anderson, Dan W. "Handwriting Research: Style and Practice." Elementary English. 42 (February, 1965), 115-125.

6. Anderson, Dan W. Teaching Handwriting: What Research Says to the Teacher. Washington, D. C.: National Education Association, 1968.

7. Anderson, Dan. "What Makes Handwriting Legible?" Elementary School Journal: 64 (April, 1969), 364-369.

8. Askov, E. "Decade of Research in Handwriting," Journal of Educational Research 64 (November, 1970), 99-111.

9. Burns, Paul C. Improving Handwriting Instruction in Elementary Schools. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing Co., 1968.

10. Clay, Marie. What Did I Write? Aukland, New Zealand: Heinemann Educational Books, 1975.

11. Enstrom, E. A. "Research in Handwriting." Elementary English. 39 (December, 1964), 876.

12. Erlebacher, Adrienne and Virgil Herrick. "Quality of Handwriting Today and Yesterday." Elementary School Journal. 62 (November, 1961), 89-93.

13. Freeman, Frank N. Teaching Handwriting, What Research Says to the Teacher, No. 4. Washington, D. C.: National Education Association, 1954.

14. Freeman, Frank. "Survey of Manuscript Writing in the Public Schools." Elementary School Journal. 46 (January, 1946), 375-380.

15. Greene, Harry A. and Walter T. Petty. Developing Language Skills in the Elementary School, 5th ed. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1975, 431-456.

16. Groff, Patrick. "The Future of Legibility," Elementary English 52 (February, 1975), 205-212, 220.

17. Groff, Patrick. "Preference for Handwriting Style by Big Business," Elementary English 41 (December, 1964), 863-64, 68.

18. Harris, Theodore L. "Handwriting." in Chester W. Harris, (ed.) Encyclopedia of Educational Research. New York: Macmillan, 1960.

19. Herrick, Virgil E. Handwriting and Related Factors: 1890-1960. Washington: Handwriting Foundation, 1961.

20. Herrick, Virgil and Wayne Otto. Letter Form Models Advocated by Commercial Handwriting Systems. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 1961.

21. Herrick, Virgil (ed.). New Horizons for Research in Handwriting. Report of the Invitational Conference on Research in Handwriting. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963.

22. Hildreth, Gertrude. "Manuscript Writing After 60 Years." Elementary English. 37 (January, 1960), 3-13.

23. Hirsh, Ed and F. C. Needermeyer. "The Effects of Tracing Prompts and Discrimination Training on Kindergarten Handwriting Performance." Journal of Educational Research. 67 (October, 1973), 81-88.

24. Horton, Lowell. "The Second R: A Working Bibliography" Elementary English 46 (April, 1969), 426-430.

25. Kean, John and Carl Personke. The Language Arts Teaching and Learning in the Elementary School. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976, 237-243.

26. Lewis, Edward R. and Hilda P. Lewis. "An Analysis of Errors in the Formation of Manuscript Letters by First-Grade Children." American Education Research Journal. 2 (1965), 25-35.

27. Neidermezer, F. G. "Kindergartners Learn to Write." Elementary School Journal. 74 (December, 1973), 130-135.

28. Newland, T. Ernest. "An Analytical Study of the Illegibilities in Handwriting from the Lower Grades to Adulthood," Journal of Educational Research, 26 (1932), 249-258.

29. Noble, J. Kendrick, Jr. "Handwriting Programs in Today's Schools." Elementary English. 40 (May, 1963), 506-512.

30. Petty, Walter, "Handwriting and Spelling: Their Current Status in the Language Arts Curriculum." Elementary English. 41 (December, 1964), 839-845, 959.

31. Quant, Leslie. "Factors Affecting the Legibility of Handwriting." Journal of Experimental Education. 14 (1946), 297-316.

32. Seifert, Eloise P. "Personal Styles of Handwriting in Grades 6, 7, 8, 9." Dissertation Abstract 20:3581- , 1960.

33. Templin, Elaine. "Research and Comment: Handwriting, the Neglected R." Elementary English, 37 (October, 1960), 386-389.

34. Templin, Elaine. "How Important is Handwriting Today?" Elementary School Journal. 61 (December, 1960), 158-164.

REFERENCES ON SPELLING

1. Aaron, I. E. "The Relationship of Selected Measures to Spelling Achievement at the Fourth and Eighth Grade Levels," Journal of Educational Research 53 (December, 1959), 138-143.

2. Brengelman, Frederick H. "Dialect and the Teaching of Spelling," Research in the Teaching of English 4:2, NCTE (Fall, 1970), pp. 129-138.

3. Burrows, Alvina T. Teaching Composition: What Research Says to The Teacher, NEA, 1959.

4. Chomsky, Carol. "Reading, Writing, and Phonology," Harvard Educational Review 40 (May, 1970), pp. 287-309.

5. Cramer, R. L. "Influence of Phonics Instruction on Spelling Achievement," The Reading Teacher 22 (March, 1969), pp. 499-503.

6. Durrell, Donald D. Improving Reading Instruction, Harcourt, 1956, pp. 232-233.

7. Groff, Patrick J. "Research Critiques: Spelling from Spoken Word to Written Symbol," Elementary English 42 (May, 1965), pp. 582-87.

8. Fitzgerald, James A. A Basic Life Spelling Vocabulary, Milwaukee: Bruce, 1951.

9. Fitzgerald, James A. The Teaching of Spelling. Bruce, 1951

10. Graham and Hugh Rudorf. "Dialect and Spelling," Elementary English 47 (March, 1970), 363-376.

11. Hanna, Jean S. and Paul R. Hanna. "Spelling as a School Subject: A Brief History," The National Elementary School Principal 38 (May, 1959), pp. 8-23.

12. Hanna, Paul R., R. E. Hodges, and Jean S. Hanna. Spelling: Structure and Strategies, Houghton, 1971.

13. Hanna, Paul R. and J. T. Moore. "Spelling from Spoken Word to Written Symbol," Elementary English Journal, 1953, pp. 329-37.

14. Hanna, Paul R., Jean S. Hanna, Richard E. Hodges, and Edwin H. Rudorf, Jr. Phoneme-Grapheme Correspondence as Cues to Spelling Improvement, Washington: U.S.O.E., 1966.

15. Hanna, Paul R. and Jean S. Hanna. "The Teaching of Spelling," The National Elementary School Principal 45 (November, 1965), pp. 19-28.

16. Hanna, Paul R. and Jean S. Hanna. "Applications of Linguistics and Psychological Cues to the Spelling Course of Study," Elementary English 42 (November, 1965), pp. 753-59.

17. Hildreth, Gertrude. Teaching Spelling. New York: Henry Holt, 1955.

18. Hodges, Richard E. "The Psychological Bases of Spelling," Elementary English 42 (October, 1965), pp. 629-635.

19. Horn, Ernest. "Phonetics and Spelling," Elementary School Journal (May, 1957), pp. 424-32.

20. Horn, Ernest. "Phonics and Spelling," Journal of Education 136 (May, 1954), pp. 233-34, 46.

21. Horn, Ernest. Teaching Spelling: What Research Says to the Teacher, No. 3, Washington, D.C.: Department of Classroom Teachers, NEA 1967.

22. Horn, Thomas D. "Research in Spelling," Elementary English 37 (March, 1960),

23. Horn, Thomas (ed.). Research on Handwriting and Spelling. Bulletin of National Conference on Research in English, NCTE, 1966.

24. Hunt, Barbara, A. Hadsell, J. Hannum, and H. W. Johnson. "The Elements of Spelling Ability," Elementary School Journal 63 (March, 1963), 342-349.

25. Kligman, D. S., Bruce A. Cronnell, and Gary B. Verna. "Black English Pronunciation and Spelling Performance," Elementary English 49 (December, 1972), 1247-53.

26. Lamb, Pose. "Linguistics and the Teaching of Spelling," from Pose Lamb, Linguistics in Proper Perspective. Merrill, 1967. pp. 64-67, 78-85.

27. Personke, Carl. "Generalizations and Spelling: Boon or Bust?" in Martha L. King, Robert Emans, and Patricia Cianciolo, A Forum for Focus (Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1973), pp. 148-57.

28. Personke, Carl. "The Use of Nonsense Words to Test Generalization Ability in Spelling," Elementary English (December, 1972), pp. 1233-37.

29. Personke, Carl and Albert H. Yee. Comprehensive Spelling Instruction. Scranton, Pennsylvania: Intext Educational Publishers, 1971.

30. Peters, Margaret L. "The Teaching of Spelling," in John E. Merritt (ed.), New Horizons in Reading, (Newark, Delaware, IRA, 1976) pp. 285-91.

31. Petty, Walter T., J. B. Murphy, and Madan Mahan. "Spelling Achievement and the Initial Teaching Alphabet: Analysis of Errors," The Elementary School Journal 74: No. 5 (October, 1974) pp. 309-313.

32. Plessas, Gus P. "Cues or Miscues in Spelling," in Martha L. King, Robert Emans, and Patricia Cianciolo, A Forum for Focus (Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1973), pp. 148-57.

33. Read, Charles. Children's Categorization of Speech Sounds in English. Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1975.

34. Simon, Dorothea P. and H. A. Simon. "Alternative Uses of Phonemic Information in Spelling," Review of Educational Research 43 (Winter, 1973), pp. 115-137.

35. Venezky, Richard L. "Linguistics and Spelling," Linguistics in School Programs, 68th Yearbook, NSSE, Part II. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970, pp. 264-274.